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FOR ACTION

RECOMMENDATION FOR SUPPLEMENTARY FUNDING FOR PROGRAMMES IN THE SOUTH ASIA REGION WITHOUT RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUNDING FROM GENERAL RESOURCES*

SUMMARY

The present document contains a recommendation for supplementary funding for a subregional programme in the South Asia region for which no recommendation for funding from general resources is requested. The Executive Director recommends that the Executive Board approve supplementary funding in the following amount for the programme listed below, subject to the availability of specific-purpose contributions.

Country/programme	Amount (United States dollars)	Duration
Subregional multimedia communications initiative for girls in South Asia	24 000 000	1995-1999

A summary of the recommendation follows. A table setting out the planned annual phasing of expenditure is given at the end of the document.

* In order to meet documentation deadlines, the present document was prepared before aggregate financial data were finalized. Final adjustments, taking into account unspent balances of programme cooperation at the end of 1994, will be contained in the "Summary of 1995 recommendations for general resources and supplementary funding programmes" (E/ICEF/1995/P/L.10 and Add.1).

Priority problems and needs of children

1. The population of the South Asia region, which consists of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, is estimated at 1.3 billion, some 450 million of whom are children under 14 years of age. More than 30 per cent of the region's total population live in absolute poverty, both in rural and, increasingly, in urban areas. While Sri Lanka and the Indian state of Kerala have achieved universal primary education and very low levels of infant and child mortality, literacy rates in Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Pakistan and several states of India are below 30 per cent.

2. In a region with many disparities, it is girls who are most deprived. Girls in South Asia suffer mostly due to strong and deep-rooted discriminatory practices and beliefs, particularly in Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan, the countries that will participate in this subregional programme. From birth, girls are treated as inferior to boys and are brought up to accept subordinate roles. The birth of a boy is welcomed as providing future economic security for the family, while a daughter is treated as a financial burden. Where the dowry system is prevalent, the birth of a daughter is often met with despair by the family. After the first year of breast-feeding, girls have higher rates of mortality and malnutrition than boys. Parents are more likely to seek medical treatment for their sons than for their daughters.

3. In Nepal, for every 100 boys enrolled in primary school, there are only 50 girls enrolled; in India, the ratio is 100:73, while in Bangladesh and Pakistan the ratios are 100:84 and 100:55, respectively. Drop-out rates are higher for girls, especially as they approach puberty. By secondary school, the boy/girl enrolment ratio ranges from 100:40 in Nepal to 100:57 in India, where less than 10 per cent of all girls complete secondary education. Many adolescent girls are often withdrawn from school into their homes to be taught their future work tasks as wives in preparation for early marriage. They are ill-equipped to assert their rights or to control their own health and fertility after marriage. Early and frequent pregnancies and poor maternal nutrition result in high maternal mortality rates.

4. The member Governments of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation declared the 1990s as the Decade of the Girl Child. The Governments understand the importance of extensive social mobilization and communication initiatives to help bring about changes in attitudes and practices that jeopardize the survival, development and protection of girls. The momentum that has been created in favour of girls must be sustained and increased. Hence a vision of a regional communications strategy arose in 1990 through a series of consultations involving government officials, media and non-governmental organization (NGO) representatives and UNICEF. These consultations led to the development of the communications initiative known as the "Meena" project.

Programme cooperation, 1990-1994

5. The concept of an animated film series for South Asia was first developed in March 1990 at a UNICEF-sponsored workshop on animated film for development. The UNICEF country programme of cooperation in Bangladesh proposed an animated film series to highlight the situation of girls in the region and to advocate for their survival, development and protection. The films would communicate common elements of a regional culture and evolve a heroine to represent girls. Meena, a name common in all the countries, emerged as the name for the heroine. The aim of the film was to provide education through entertainment. Another powerful concept was that educational and promotional products could popularize the messages of "Meena".

6. Since 1990, the "Meena" concept has received strong support from Governments and NGOs in the region, particularly in Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan. Initial funding for the project in the amount of $139,000 was made available in 1991 from the UNICEF country programme of cooperation in Bangladesh, and in 1992, from the global communication support fund through supplementary funds in the amount of $142,600 provided by the Government of Norway. During the first phase of the project (May 1991 to December 1992), a pilot episode of the "Meena" film series was produced.

7. The character Meena presents a dynamic role model for girls and serves as a powerful advocate for girls' rights. The film series is the core of the project. Meena succeeds against discrimination to gain equal treatment and respect. The underlying messages are serious and the stories are enjoyable, capitalizing on the entertainment value of animation. In the first phase of the project, the UNICEF/Government of Bangladesh programme of cooperation took the lead in producing materials and also cooperated with other countries on research, development and the production of films and other materials. The animated films were produced in India and the Philippines.

8. India, Nepal and Pakistan became more involved in the second phase of the project during 1993. Funding for the second phase, which will continue through 1995, came from two grants of $289,000 and $904,600 from the Government of Norway and was channelled through the global communication support fund. The respective country programmes also have provided funds as the project has developed, as a key element in their programmes.

9. During 1993 and 1994, the participating country programmes developed strategies and partnerships for dissemination and outreach activities. The first "Meena" film was produced in 14 languages and broadcast on national and local television in Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan. A package of materials was distributed to government agencies and NGOs to support gender-training and basic education. In Bangladesh, cinemas and mobile film units showed "Meena" to over 750,000 rural people, and 1 million comic books were distributed to primary schools. In India, 13 language versions of the first film are being broadcast on television, and there is also a version for radio. Four National Committees for UNICEF in Europe are using local language versions of the film in children's programmes and for education for development. Several other countries and regions are exploring possibilities for the adaption of "Meena" to their own situations. The first film already has been produced in Arabic, Burmese and Chinese. Several potential donors have also expressed great interest in the concept and in providing supplementary funding for the subregional programme.

10. The second phase of the project involves the production of a multimedia package of communication materials, including 12 more episodes of the film, comic books, posters, a radio series (co-produced with the British Broadcasting Corporation World Service) and guide books for group discussions and child-to-child education activities. By the end of 1994, four additional film episodes on girl child themes and on child survival and health had been completed and four more were under production. The remaining four episodes were being researched and will be produced in 1995, together with supplementary multimedia materials. The complete package of materials will be launched throughout the subregion in the latter half of 1995.

11. The project is exploring the sustainability of the "Meena" initiative through the development of commercial products and potential corporate or broadcasting partnerships for future episodes. Social marketing of the "Meena" image could popularize the heroic symbol of Meena and convey key messages as well as earn income to sustain the project. In Bangladesh, some prototype commercial products, on which market research has been conducted, have been developed. Various commercial possibilities will be explored further.

Lessons learned

12. Research has validated the social acceptability of animation for conveying development messages. Experience in the four countries also has succeeded in developing "Meena" as a regional cultural identity for the girl child. Audiences across the social spectrum throughout the region find "Meena" appealing as a cartoon character and as a symbol of the girl child. They admire her determination and dynamism. These results demonstrate that research on the situation of girls and prevailing social attitudes on gender issues is essential in each country for each episode of this creative communication process. Exchange of experience with countries in other parts of the world where major communications initiatives in favour of girls have been tried has shown the value of such strategies for advocacy and social mobilization.

13. The project has generated capacity-building for the participating countries in terms of communication planning, research and development, and production. The country programmes also have begun to be exposed to the complex world of licensing, commercialization of products, merchandising and broadcasting linkages for sustaining and promoting "Meena". UNICEF cooperation is pioneering potential ways for reaching millions of people, with the prospect of some self-financing of future activities. However, with the rapid expansion of the scope of the "Meena" initiative, the project will need a stronger institutional base. Current administrate capacity is not sufficient to allow the project to grow to its full potential. Hence a priority is to explore the possibility of establishing public trusts or foundations in countries or at the regional level, with UNICEF and government support.

14. There is a potentially significant demand for additional "Meena" films and other materials, both within the subregion as well as in other locations, including Europe and North America. Some of the world's successful media groups have shown increasing interest in "Meena" and her potential for public education on the rights of girls. The future development of the "Meena" initiative could further the cause of girls, not only in South Asia, but wherever the situation of women and girls needs to be improved.

Recommended programme cooperation, 1995-1999

15. The "Meena" initiative would continue and expand as an integral part of programmes for children and women in the region, in particular, in Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan. The primary aim will continue to be to improve the status of girls in South Asia. The strategy will be to influence and support the forces of social and behavioural change in the subregion through an intensive communications effort. The following will be the guiding principles for implementation:

(a) Improvement of the survival, development and protection of children and women requires rapid progress towards eliminating gender disparities and promoting the empowerment of girls and women as equal partners in development;

(b) Such changes can be brought about through a process of awareness-creation, education and mobilization for action, which permeate throughout society, and by employing a wide range of strategies and communication efforts;

(c) The "Meena" initiative helps to create synergy between the activities of the Government, NGOs and UNICEF.

16. Meena's positive image reinforces support for programme thrusts and activities for girls and creates a social climate which is conducive for behavioural and social change.

Objectives and strategies

17. The project proposes (a) to create greater awareness about the situation of girls in South Asia, particularly in the subregion, and to help mobilize action in their favour; (b) to influence and support efforts aimed at social and behavioural changes concerning girls at national, community and family levels; (c) to promote "Meena" as a dynamic role model for girls, through which they can raise their self-esteem and learn life skills essential for their empowerment; and (d) to empower families with information and life skills related to the survival and development of girls, especially regarding health, nutrition and education.

18. These objectives will be pursued through the development of a multimedia communications package based on the "Meena" concept, mass dissemination and strong cooperation between UNICEF, Governments, NGOs, the media and the private sector at regional and national levels. Each country will be responsible for preparing and implementing a plan for the dissemination of the communication package, developing its own opportunities and linking up with various sectoral programmes and activities. The communications strategy is based on three elements: advocacy; social mobilization; and programme communication. Advocacy creates the political will and commitment to the cause of girls. Social mobilization involves building partnerships for the promotion of action in favour of girls and ensuring the participation of Governments, NGOs, the private sector and communities. Programme communication is concerned with the communication materials, dissemination channels, training and education at various levels to empower people by changing their attitudes and behaviour. It also helps people to realize the value of various basic services. This strategy is based not only on the recent experience in Bangladesh but also on experiences in other countries where communications initiatives have been undertaken for advocacy purposes.

19. Capacity-building and training activities with Governments, NGOS and private sector partners also will be central to the programme strategy. The programme will provide resource materials to promote the use of the "Meena" concept as well as undertake the training of key trainers of government and NGO partners in communication skills, gender issues and the utilization of "Meena" materials, for example, their use in formal and non-formal education activities. Advisory services to assist in planning and implementing training activities also will be provided.

Regional support activities

20. Regional activities will focus on (a) regional- and country-level advocacy, so that girl child issues remain on the political and social agenda; (b) coordination of the production of a second series of 12 animated films and multimedia support materials in collaboration with UNICEF country offices, independent producers, writers and media; (c) support for the development of outreach and dissemination activities at national and subnational levels and coordination of the exchange of information and skills between countries in the subregion; (d) training and capacity-building in communications planning, material development and production, marketing and merchandising; (e) establishment of partnerships with national, regional and international producers, distributors and broadcasters to promote the use and further development of the "Meena" film series and other multimedia materials; (f) the development of strategies for the long-term sustainability of the "Meena" initiative, with the possibility of self-financing; (g) coordination of the development of the commercial potential of the "Meena" initiative, including marketing of materials, syndication and licensing within the region and worldwide; and (h) research to assess the impact of the "Meena" initiative and to identify needs for future materials and training with UNICEF country offices as well as with regional and national institutions.

Programme activities at country and subnational levels

21. National communication strategies for the "Meena" initiative and plans and budgets have been developed by each country. As presented below, the plans aim to reach all sectors of society through viable communication channels. Activities are being designed in collaboration with partners in Governments, NGOs and the private sector. The "Meena" initiative will become an integral part of each country programme, supplementing and complementing other communication activities as necessary.

22. At country and subnational levels, programme activities will focus on: (a) development and implementation of a plan of action for nationwide social mobilization for girls, especially promoting the "Meena" concept through strategic electronic and other communication channels; (b) establishment of programme linkages between the "Meena" initiative and programme activities across all relevant sectors; (c) promotion of the wide-scale utilization of the multimedia "Meena" communication package, suitably adapted to country and local situations, in collaboration with government agencies, NGOs and private sector partners, with special efforts made to use formal and non-formal education programmes as channels for "Meena" materials given that the initiative is a process of change through education; (d) establishment or strengthening of national and subnational capacity for the production of "Meena" communication materials, based on local needs and expertise; (e) capacity-building in materials production, communication planning, qualitative research and training, especially on life skills and child-to-child concepts; and (f) development of "Meena" commercial products, in collaboration with NGOs and the commercial sector, and the development of a commercial strategy for the promotion and sale of "Meena" products in national markets.

Country strategies and activities

23. In each country, strategies and activities will continue to be tailored to national and local situations. The types of materials produced and disseminated, the media channels used and the programmes, services and activities through which messages related to "Meena" and materials can be channelled will be determined on the basis of continuous assessment of capacities and opportunities.

24. Bangladesh. The Government of Bangladesh and, in particular, the Ministry of Information and the Ministry of Primary Education, have been active partners in the development of the "Meena" project. Through Bangladesh television, the "Meena" animated film series and special programmes/documentaries already reach political leaders and policy makers, the urban population and opinion leaders in the rural areas. The "Meena" films reach rural audiences through the Department of Mass Communication's 67 mobile film units. Through the Department of Films and Publications, films can be distributed to over 700 cinemas. Through the Ministry of Primary Education, comic books reach children in the 47,000 government primary schools. Other ministries also are taking roles in disseminating the materials which relate to their own programmes. For example, the Ministry of Health and Family Planning will be using the "Meena" package on home management of diarrhoea.

25. A number of NGOs also are disseminating the "Meena" materials, especially to support non-formal education and gender-training. The Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) is implementing "Meena" activities. This cooperation will take advantage of BRAC programme communication channels and build on the expertise and achievements of BRAC in education and mobilization activities. After an initial period of implementation, the future institutional shape of the "Meena" initiative in Bangladesh will be assessed and agreed upon jointly by the Government, BRAC and UNICEF. All activities will be grounded in

research and will seek to use advocacy and programme communication strategies to sustain and enhance the development of girls and women in Bangladesh.

26. India. In India, UNICEF has worked together with central and state Governments to develop a nation-wide plan for the utilization of the "Meena" materials. The valuable role that "Meena" can play in improving teacher and community awareness of the importance of interactive, relevant and enjoyable learning has been recognized and could contribute to higher learning achievement and retention rates. To position the "Meena" initiative as a serious concern and highlight the importance of the messages, a number of documentaries have been produced to accompany the series of films. A range of resource materials and guidebooks also are being prepared, and research is under way to determine the most effective approaches for using the "Meena" concept.

27. In the strategy for the dissemination of "Meena" activities, full use will be made of the country's rapidly growing mass media. Other channels close to children, families and communities also will be used, for example, those that reach children directly, such as primary schools; programmes and services at the community level, such as the national youth movement and women's development programmes; and channels that reach the public-at-large, such as communication services, educational institutions and NGOs.

28. Nepal. The communication strategy in Nepal will seek to position "Meena" as a role model for children, especially girls. As television coverage in Nepal is still low, the principal strategy will be a multimedia package, for example, use of radio, cinema, comic books, puppets and interpersonal communication. The "Meena" communication package will be integrated into UNICEF-assisted programmes, such as primary school teacher-training, literacy and post-literacy projects, small farmer development, women's groups and training for women workers. A primary target audience will be children, and through them, adults. Social development workers also will be targeted during training.

29. Pakistan. In Pakistan, the "Meena" initiative will be part of the communication effort for achieving the decade goals for children and promoting child rights. The dissemination strategy will use advocacy to gain commitments from policy makers. This will be combined with social mobilization to build partnerships in development, the private sector and other social and professional groups. Parents and communities will be made aware of the special needs of girls and will be helped to recognize the advantages of ending all forms of discrimination against girls. "Meena" will serve as a representative of Pakistani girls to help focus society's attention on their special needs.

Development of sustainability and institutional bases

30. Initial efforts have commenced to explore the commercial potential of the "Meena" concept and materials as one way of sustaining "Meena" activities. Copyright, licensing arrangements, marketing, prospects for self-financing and fund-raising, and the distribution of films and other materials are being explored. Potential cooperation or partnerships with national and international media enterprises and production companies will be assessed. The use of "Meena" materials in industrialized countries and through National Committees for UNICEF, both for fund-raising and development education, also will be explored further.

31. Experience during the past two years has shown that a production centre may be needed in the region and possibly in each country to sustain the momentum of production and dissemination of materials. These centres also could undertake marketing activities for the project and establish linkages with the private sector. The alternatives in this regard are being explored and will be pursued during the next phase. By the end of the third phase of the project, the

"Meena" initiative should be able to become a largely self-financing entity, with close links to UNICEF and in support of each country's needs.

Monitoring and evaluation

32. Pre-testing and the evaluation of concepts and materials have been essential elements of the project's planning and implementation strategies. Intensive formative research was conducted in all four countries, as were initial impact assessments. These processes will continue throughout the next phase to ensure the appropriateness and acceptability of messages and materials being developed. Periodic reviews of implementation, involving government, UNICEF, NGO and media representatives, will take place at regional, national and, if necessary, subnational levels.

33. A strong research and evaluation component has been built into the programme at regional and country levels. The project will develop a systematic research programme to assess the impact of the initiative in all countries, in collaboration with appropriate regional and national institutions. In addition, in each country, the effectiveness of specific materials, channels and dissemination strategies will be evaluated.

Administrative structures and responsibilities

34. A special unit, to be established at the UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia in Kathmandu, will be responsible for coordinating implementation of the programme in the subregion. Comprised of a project officer and three local support staff, the unit will work closely with the UNICEF offices in each country which, in turn, already have established national coordination structures involving Government, NGO and media. With the establishment of this unit, responsibility for the coordination of the project will move from the Bangladesh country office, which has provided much of the required support and coordination.

35. Although the programme is being presented as a subregional initiative, most of the funds will be allocated to the respective country programmes. Annual plans of action will be developed on the basis of which financial allocations will be made. Funds made available to countries will cover production, dissemination and activities. Funds available to countries under the programme may be supplemented by funds from existing or future country programmes.

Support required

36. To support implementation of this initiative at regional and country levels, $24,000,000 in supplementary funds will be required over the five-year period, 1995-1999. The annual requirements for the regional component and for activities in each country are estimated in the table below.

Estimated annual expenditure

(In thousands of United States dollars)

Country/component	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	Total
Regional						
Personnel and travel	270	280	295	310	320	1 475
Consultants/subcontracts	250	200	170	150	150	920
Equipment	55	35	35	10	10	145
Training/workshops	110	110	50	35	40	345
Animation production	-	410	685	275	-	1 370
Reproduction/masters	10	10	15	20	-	55
Contingencies	20	20	20	20	20	100
Subtotal	715	1 065	1 270	820	540	4 410
Bangladesh						
Advocacy	60	60	60	30	30	240
Production	90	80	80	80	80	410
Dissemination	390	290	275	275	275	1 505
Capacity-building	205	145	105	95	95	645
Equipment and supplies	40	30	30	20	20	140
Communications centre	160	170	180	190	200	900
Monitoring/evaluation	40	60	65	65	90	320
Subtotal	985	835	795	755	790	4 160
India						
Audio-visual materials	500	500	500	500	500	2 500
Print materials	500	500	500	500	500	2 500
Dissemination	400	500	500	500	400	2 300
Consultants	90	100	100	80	80	450
Subcontracts	65	100	50	50	50	315
Training	100	200	200	200	100	800
Production	40	50	50	40	30	210
Equipment	125	225	125	25	25	525
Research	80	100	100	60	60	400
Subtotal	1 900	2 275	2 125	1 955	1 745	10 000
Nepal						
Personnel	15	15	15	15	15	75
Production/duplication	70	60	40	30	30	230
Radio production	10	10	10	10	10	50
Screening/dissemination	100	100	100	100	100	500
Equipment	130	-	-	-	-	130
Training	30	30	30	30	30	150
Monitoring/evaluation	20	20	20	20	20	100
Contingency	25	15	15	15	15	85
Subtotal	400	250	230	220	220	1 320

Country/component	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	Total
Pakistan						
Advocacy	20	30	30	15	15	110
Social mobilization	105	70	70	35	35	315
Print materials	350	400	400	400	300	1 850
Media materials	300	350	350	350	300	1 650
Training	20	30	30	15	15	110
Monitoring/evaluation	15	15	15	15	15	75
Subtotal	810	895	895	830	680	4 110
Total	4 810	5 320	5 315	4 580	3 975	24 000